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Discussion on the special theme for the year: "Indigenous peoples: development with culture and identity: articles 3 and 32 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples"

Information received from non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs

The Asia Indigenous Peoples' Pact organized a series of indigenous development conferences between 2005 and 2008 in order to provide a venue for indigenous peoples in Asia to identify and reach a common understanding of the concepts, issues and needs with respect to indigenous development. Community leaders from 13 Asian countries attended these conferences and issued recommendations detailing the minimum requirements for respecting and promoting indigenous development from the perspective of indigenous communities in Asia. Their recommendations were submitted to the ninth session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues by the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs.

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I. Asia indigenous development conferences: background

1. The Asia Indigenous Peoples' Pact organized a series of indigenous development conferences between 2005 and 2008 in order to provide a venue for indigenous peoples in Asia to identify and reach a common understanding of the concepts, issues and needs regarding indigenous development. Community leaders from 13 Asian countries attended these conferences.

2. Indigenous development is defined as "the growth or progress of an indigenous community in their originality or within the context of their ethnic identity in a holistic way".

3. Indigenous identity is based on 10 interrelated, indivisible and interdependent systems: cultural, social, spiritual, political/institutional, juridical, economic, natural resource management, technological, health and educational/ways of learning.

4. The adoption in September 2007 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples provided affirmative support to the perspectives of indigenous peoples in developing these elements. It also provided the framework for pursuing such development models and for informing Governments of their duties and obligations to reform models of development that are detrimental to indigenous peoples.

5. The below recommendations are the minimum requirements, from the perspectives of indigenous communities in Asia, for respecting and promoting indigenous development.

II. Recommendations

Cultural, social and spiritual dimensions

For indigenous peoples:

6. To strengthen efforts to maintain traditional and collective values through the promotion of traditional ways of learning and the transference of indigenous knowledge.

7. To address gender gaps such as the exclusion from, or inadequate representation in, decision-making processes and leadership roles, justice mechanisms and ceremonies. Issues of birth prohibitions, bride price and gender-based violence should also be addressed.

8. To initiate interfaith dialogues to promote understanding and respect for indigenous spirituality.

For States and United Nations organizations:

9. To promote cultural development by respecting indigenous spirituality and refraining from adopting policies that promote a particular religion, and to respect the right of every indigenous person to choose, follow and practise a religion of choice.

10. To ensure social development and to protect social structures, States must recognize indigenous social institutions and values, such as sharing and hospitality.

States must also avoid intervention and imposition on indigenous governance systems.

Political/institutional and juridical

For indigenous peoples:

11. To develop means of resolving conflicts in areas where traditional political systems are affected by the imposition of modern or State structures or where hybrid institutions exist. The values of honesty, accountability, transparency and upholding the community interest/common good over personal interest must be strengthened.

12. To find means of increasing gender equity, sustaining orally transmitted customary laws and enhancing the capacity of traditional leaders for quality judgements and decisions, especially within the framework of broader decision-making mechanisms.

For States and United Nations organizations:

13. To respect and recognize the political institutions of indigenous peoples. In order to achieve this recommendation, any initiative to establish other organizations must be based on the full participation and consent of indigenous communities, and such organizations must not be designed to replace indigenous political institutions.

14. To allow indigenous communities to select their traditional leaders based on their own systems and to freely exercise their juridical rights and pursue their juridical developments within their communities.

15. To refrain from codifying customary law, but to formalize it through documentation efforts.

16. To assist in maintaining and promoting traditional juridical systems, if more than one legal system exists, in the interface between the State and indigenous peoples.

Economy, natural resources and technology

For indigenous peoples:

17. To enhance efforts to utilize indigenous technologies instead of modern technologies and to prioritize the continuation of the transmission of knowledge between generations.

18. To encourage young people to appreciate and pursue traditional occupations and to be critical of modern technologies and values that have negative impacts.

19. To take concrete measures to combat the disappearance of indigenous knowledge, which leads to the erosion of customary law and governance of natural resources.

For States and United Nations organizations:

20. To legally recognize the principles of indigenous economic systems based on sustainability and self-reliance, and to allow indigenous communities the freedom to

practise and apply these principles. The negative branding of indigenous practices such as shifting cultivation should be avoided.

21. To adhere to accepted international human rights standards on promoting and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples to their territories, natural resource management and governance.

22. To increase funds allocated for conservation and natural resource management projects that are subject to the consent of indigenous communities. Such funds should serve as a means of revitalizing the use of indigenous knowledge and technologies and economic systems based on collective social responsibility and reciprocity. Indigenous knowledge and technology should be explored as a means of achieving food security, and for adaptation to and mitigation of climate change.

23. To provide technical assistance in the development of renewable energy and other sustainable and environmentally friendly technologies to enhance the self-reliance and comprehensive development of indigenous communities, subject to their free, prior and informed consent.

Health and indigenous education

For indigenous peoples:

24. To take steps to encourage intergenerational transfers of knowledge and to conserve this knowledge, to be used in conjunction with programmes that target the health of indigenous peoples.

25. To find means of stimulating interest in maintaining indigenous ways of learning within the community, based on indigenous peoples' own needs.

For States and United Nations organizations:

26. To recognize indigenous health systems and practices and to protect traditional knowledge and medicines by recognizing the rights of indigenous peoples with regard to intellectual property and through alternative legislation using customary law to regulate access.

27. To allow indigenous peoples to participate in planning, programming, implementation and decision-making regarding health services for their own communities. Equality and non-discrimination must be ensured, particularly in relation to access to health services in remote areas. To ensure that health services are suitably attuned to the needs of indigenous peoples, through ongoing data collection and the monitoring of outcomes, using appropriate indicators.

28. To support the right of indigenous peoples to maintain and develop their educational systems and institutions, including initiatives to teach their own languages and the development of multilingual educational systems.